

NRCS **NEWS RELEASE**

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USDA REQUESTS PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NEW CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM

LANSING, MI, Feb. 18, 2003—USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Michigan State Conservationist Ron Williams today announced that the advance notice of proposed rulemaking and request for comments on the Conservation Security Program (CSP) was published in the Federal Register. This is a new program authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill.

The advance notice gives the public the opportunity to comment on key issues that have been raised regarding implementation of the program. The issues are presented in the advance notice.

"Comments gathered during the 30-day comment period will help us develop a proposed rule," Williams said. "Then, the public will have another opportunity to provide input during the comment period for the proposed rule before a final rule is published. We want this to be the best program possible." The 30-day comment period ends on March 20, 2003.

CSP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to conserve and improve soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life on tribal and private working lands—cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture and rangeland, as well as certain forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation.

"The intent of CSP is to support ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural lands by providing assistance to producers to maintain and enhance natural resources," Williams said.

CSP has a unique role among USDA conservation programs. It identifies and rewards those farmers and ranchers who meet the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations, creates powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance on their operations, and provides public benefits for generations to come.

Comments must be received in writing within 30 days of the date that the advance notice is published in the Federal Register. The advance notice and additional information on CSP can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/products.html>.

Additional information about the Farm Bill can be found at <http://www.usda.gov/farmbill/index.html>.

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